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Do you experience numbness in your fingers and toes? If so, it could be a warning sign of a circulatory disorder known as Raynaud's phenomenon. Two experts discuss the condition.

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Citation

MLA
What is Raynaud’s Syndrome?

SAVANNAH GUTHRIE, Anchor: The Raynaud phenomenon. It’s a condition triggered by cold weather and stress that causes numbness in your fingers, toes, and other areas of your body. Dr. Fred Wigley and Dr. Thomas Reifsnyder up from Johns Hopkins Medical Center. Good morning to you both

Dr. Fred Wigley: Good morning
Dr. Thomas Reifsnyder: Good Morning.

GUTHRIE: All right, Dr. Wigley, let’s start with you. Because a lot of people that may have this and might not even know they have it. What are the symptoms?

Dr. Wigley: The Raynaud’s phenomenon as you said is an excessive sensitivity to cold temperature. So the doctor will ask the patient “well, how do you feel” and they’ll say, “I’m more sensitive to cold than most patients.” And they’ll experience cold sensations that lead to a white pallor to the fingers as an attack, and then change to a blue discoloration of the fingers. And when it recovers, it turns red.

GUTHRIE: And full disclosure, I actually have this myself but generally—sometimes I just see one finger turn that way, is that something that’s typical?

Dr. Wigley: well some people say they have a dominant finger. Its usually the index finger, the thumb is less likely to be affected but both the hands and feet and sometimes the nose and the ears can be affected as well.

GUTHRIE: Dr. Reifsnyder, what causes this?

Dr. Reifsnyder: Well, that’s a good question. It’s obviously set off by cold; it can be set off by stress. We think it’s ah…there’s a bunch of different theories about what is going on as far as in the fingers and the toes to do it. It’s not totally uh…elucidated.

GUTHRIE: Dr. Wigley, its interesting that stress could be a cause. How…explain that.

Dr. Wigley: Well you have to understand that normal response to cold, it turns out that human beings, we like to keep our core temperature the same. And our brain is a very selfish—it likes to keep itself warm. And it sacrifices the skin in order to do that. So the brain is wired to the skin through the nervous system. It causes the blood vessels to constrict with cold, shifting the blood to the center of the body. And as a consequence when you’re nervous, the same thing happens, like my hands are cold right now.
GUTHRIE: Sorry about that. We’ll get you some hand warmers. Actually, we have some right next to you; we’ll get to that in a minute. Dr. Reifsnyder, I mean generally, this is a nuisance. But is it…can it be very serious?

Dr. Reifsnyder: It can be serious when Raynaud’s is a symptom of another illness. And that’s sort of where surgeons come into play. Because normally this is a medically treated or…or protection treated type of disease.

GUTHRIE: Dr. Wigley, what are some of the treatments?

Dr. Wigley: Well the first thing is, is what the doctor always says “Don’t do this.” So stay away from the cold. I just saw you outside. So one of the first things we do is that I tell patients to wear gloves, and I have some nice Christmas gloves that I thought I would give you to help you with your Raynaud’s. GUTHRIE: Oh, thank you! Look, they kind of match my outfit. Thank you. Are some gloves better than others?

Dr. Wigley: Yeah, I think multilayered gloves are better than big bulky gloves. They’re even having electric heated gloves that have wires that go up into the fingers. And you can also put in one of these hot packs that you can slip into your pocket and keep your…

GUTHRIE: A little stocking stuffer for me. I’m going to take all that, I’ll just put it in my bag here.

Dr. Wigley: It’s also shifting temperatures, like going to the grocery store. I’m sure you’d say the worst place I go is grocery shopping in a cold area. It’s sitting still where the cold breeze is blowing on you. So workers need a place that they can park close to their job, they need to have a heater and a space heater close to them. These heating—there’s nothing better than warm temperatures.

GUTHRIE: Well, we showed some of these scary pictures, Dr. Reifsnyder, some people might think of frostbite. But this is different.

Dr. Reifsnyder: This is different. Most people with primary Raynaud’s don’t end up losing any type of tissue or developing sores. So it’s generally a benign condition and a lot of people as they get older, actually grow out of it.

GUTHRIE: Well, I haven’t grown out of it yet. But it’s good to have your perspective. Dr. Wigley, Dr. Reifsnyder, thank you so much. Have a great holiday.

Dr. Fred Wigley: Thank you

Dr. Thomas Reifsnyder: Thank you.

GUTHRIE: And thanks for the present.